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ABSTRACT

A study examined age and sex differences in engagement style and locus of control and their influence on African-American parent-adolescent relationships. The study subjects were 71 students in 9th grade and 57 students in 11th grade from 4 high schools in a large midwestern city; 46 college freshmen attending a large midwestern university; and 46 sets of parents across the 3 age levels. Most of the participants (96%) were African-American, 3% were Hispanic; and 1% were White. Study findings included the following: (1) male students were significantly more externally controlled than female students; (2) with respect to engagement style, on a continuum between patient and agent, females' scores were significantly more "agent" than males; (3) college freshmen were more "agent" than 9th graders and were significantly more externally controlled than 11th graders; (4) college freshmen rated their mothers as more authoritative than did 11th graders; (5) college freshmen females scored higher than 9th grade females on expressiveness; (6) college freshmen scored lower than 9th graders on perceived control in their families; (7) males rated their fathers as more authoritative than did females; (8) females rated their families as higher on conflict than did males; and (9) responses from mothers and adolescents were significantly correlated on 7 of the 10 subscales, while responses from fathers and adolescents were significantly correlated on only 1 subscale. (AC)

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ED 364 331

# Developmental Differences in Engagement Style, Locus of Control, and Parent-Adolescent Relationships in African-American Families

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Poster presented at the 60th Anniversary meeting of the Society for Research on Child Development, New Orleans, Louisiana, March 25-28, 1993.

## Hypotheses

1. Males will be more external on Locus of Control than females
2. Females will be more agent on Engagement Style than males
3. Older adolescents will be more agent on Engagement style than younger adolescents
4. Older adolescents will be more internally controlled than younger adolescents

## Subjects

The 174 subjects (96% African-American, 3% hispanic, and 1% white) were from four high schools in a large midwestern city and a large midwestern university.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 71 - 9th graders | 28 male | 43 female $x_{age}=14.6$ |
| 57 - 11th graders | 37 male | 20 female $x_{age}=16.5$ |
| 46 - college fresh | 19 male | 26 female $x_{age}=19.9$ |
| 174 | 84 | 89 |

46 sets of parents also participated across the three age levels.

## Instruments

Engagement Style Questionnaire (McKinney, 1980)

Family Environment Scale (Moos, 1974)

Parent Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1989)

Internal-External Scale for Locus of Control (Rotter, 1966)

## Introduction

Research is needed to describe developmental differences in the parent-adolescent relationship of African-American families. There have been many studies that have examined the influence of parenting style on the family environment in white or nondefined samples, but little attention has been paid to normative aspects of the African-American development or the family. For example, Engagement Style has not been studied in minorities nor has it been studied as it relates to parent-child relationships. Additionally, although a considerable amount of research has focused on Locus of Control and parent-child relationships, it has not focused on minority families.

This study examined age and sex differences in Engagement Style and Locus of Control and their influence on characteristics of the African-American parent-adolescent relationship. Many studies of parent-adolescent relationships have focused on specific aspects of the relationship such as amount of conflict, patterns of communication or time spent together. Few studies have examined how each person in the relationship perceives his or her interaction with the environment and how this routine style of interacting affects the relationship between the parent and the adolescent. Rather than study the areas of communication and conflict in the parent-adolescent relationship as has often been done, this study explored constructs that may underlie the styles of communicating and negotiating in various interpersonal relationships including the parent-adolescent relationship.

Parenting Style, Locus of Control, and Engagement Style were each studied along with the family environment.

## Results of Predicted Relationships

Hypothesis 1

Males were more significantly more externally controlled than females, $t$=-2.995, $p$<.004 ($M_{males}$=12.23; $M_{females}$=10.78). Figure 1

Hypothesis 2

Females scored significantly more agent than males, $t$=2.409, $p$<.017 ($M_{males}$=4.614; $M_{females}$=6.394). Figure 2

Hypothesis 3

College freshmen scored significantly more agent than ninth grade students, $F(5,167)$=3.475, $p$<.005). Figure 3

Hypothesis 4

College freshmen were significantly more externally controlled than 11th grade students, $F(2,169)$=47.476, $p$<.013. Figure 4

## Age Differences

*College freshmen rated their mothers as significantly more authoritative than 11th grade students, $F(2,166)$=3.703, $p$<.027). Figure 5

*College freshmen scored significantly higher than 11th grade students on the Expressiveness subscale of the FES, $F(2, 171)$=6.828, $p$<.001. Figure 6

*College freshmen scored significantly lower on the Control Subscale of the FES than 9th grade students, $F(2, 171)$=9.600, $p$<.001). Figure 7

## Sex Differences

*Males (M=33.919) rated fathers as more Authoritative than females (M=31.795), $t$=1.909, $p$<.050. Figure 8

*Females (M=4.311) rated their families significantly higher on the Conflict subscale of the FES than males (M=3.595), $t$=-1.909, $p$<.053. Figure 9

*There were significant correlations between mothers' ratings and students' ratings on seven of the 10 subscales of the FES; while on only one of the ten subscales did fathers' and students' ratings correlate ($X^2$=7.5, $p$<.01). Table 1

## Discussion

Age and sex differences were found as predicted on engagement style, but not on locus of control. In addition to the predicted age and sex differences, other differences were found on the ratings of parenting style and characteristics of the parent adolescent relationship.

### Engagement Style

This study found that females scored higher than males on agency. This finding is contrary to the findings of McKinney (1981), which did not find sex differences. As predicted, older adolescents were more agentic than the younger adolescents in this study. This can be explained by their increased amount of autonomous activity in their environments. College freshmen are required to make more decisions for themselves and play a more "active agent" role to maintain themselves.

### Locus of Control

Males, in this study, were significantly more externally controlled than females. Although contrary to typical research findings on locus of control, this finding is consistent with research that has examined the locus of control of African-Americans (DiCindio, Floyd, Wilcox, and McSeveney, 1983). Being more externally controlled is positively associated with other outcome variables such as self-esteem. Also contrary to most research, this study found that the older subjects were more externally controlled than the younger subjects. One way to explain this finding is to consider the environment of the African-American college freshmen on a predominantly white campus. The ninth and eleventh grade students are in environments that are basically

stable and familiar to them, therefore they may in fact feel that they are more in control of that environment. College freshmen, on the other hand, are more likely to have recently experienced a considerable change in their environments. They are attending a large university and may feel as though they are not in control, or not getting the expected reinforcement from the environment as they try to maneuver themselves through the maze of selecting appropriate classes.

Parenting Style

College freshmen rated mothers as more authoritative than did eleventh grade subjects. As college freshmen gain more control of their lives and their parents relinquish some control over their adolescents, the relationship can become more egalitarian and democratic. This study examined parenting style from the perspective of the adolescent. It would be interesting to investigate parenting style and changes in parenting style from the perspective of the parent of African-American adolescents.

Parent-Adolescent Relationship

Previous research using the FES on African-American adolescents found age differences only on the Independence scale. This finding was not replicated in the current study. However, older adolescents scored significantly higher on Expressiveness than younger adolescents. The significantly higher level of expressiveness found in the college freshmen could be related to the tendency, found in this study, for college student to rate their mothers as more authoritative than eleventh grade students. Authoritative parents, according to Baumrind, are more democratic in their parenting style.

College freshmen also rated their family environment as lower on the Control

subscale than did ninth grade students. One would expect that college freshmen would feel less control than ninth grade subjects. College freshmen are typically young adults of legal age. Many of them are living away from home and making their own decisions about many of the issues that would come under parental control for a ninth grade subject.

The responses from mothers and adolescents were significantly correlated on seven out of the ten subscales while fathers and adolescents were significantly correlated on only one subscale. It could be that the majority of subjects who had parent data were females and adolescent females typically identify more with their mothers than their fathers. It would be interesting to examine this phenomenon with males and their fathers.

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**Figure 1: Males were significantly more externally controlled than females**

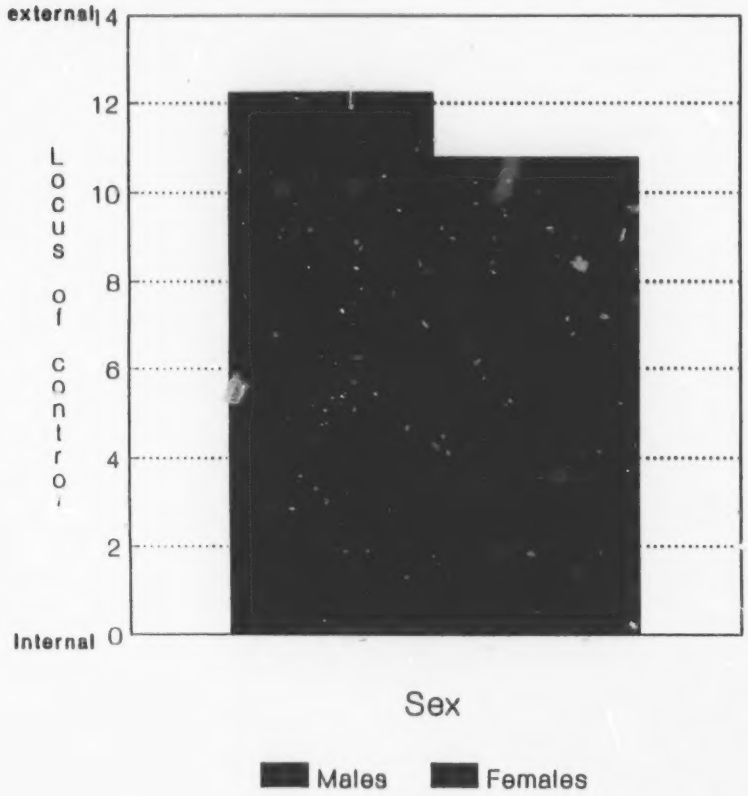





**Figure 2: Females scored significantly more agent on Engagement Style than males**

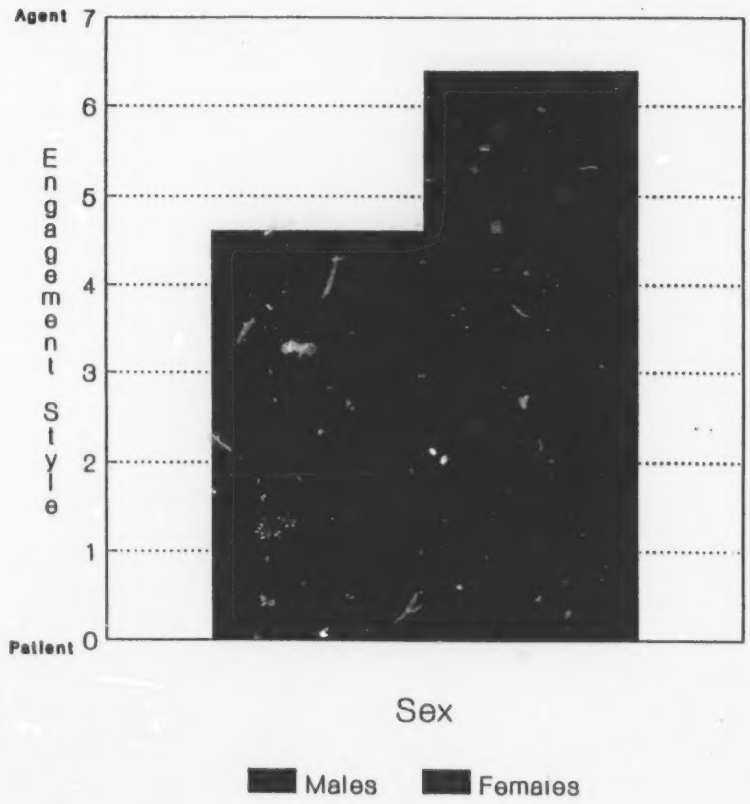
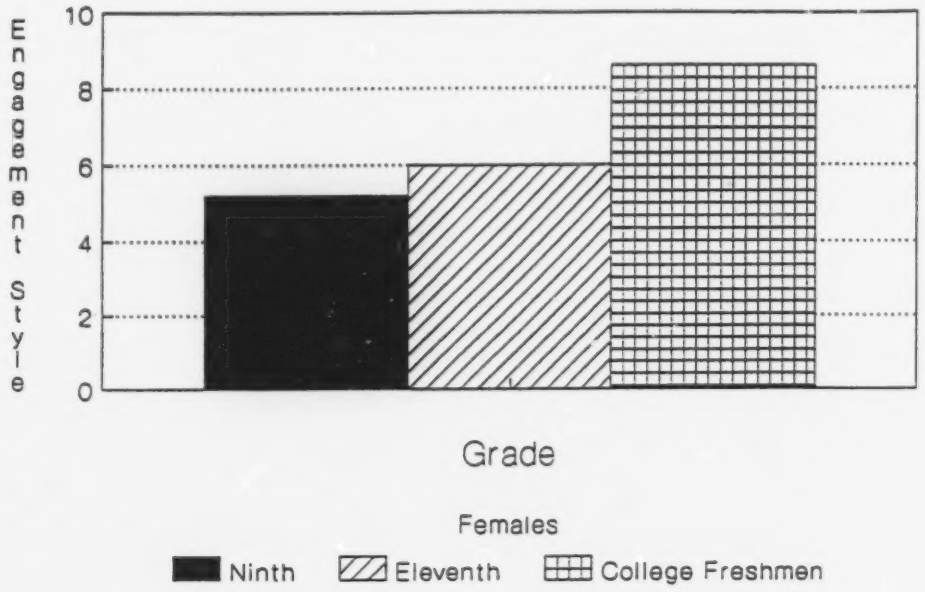


**Figure 3: College freshmen scored significantly more agent than ninth grade subjects**



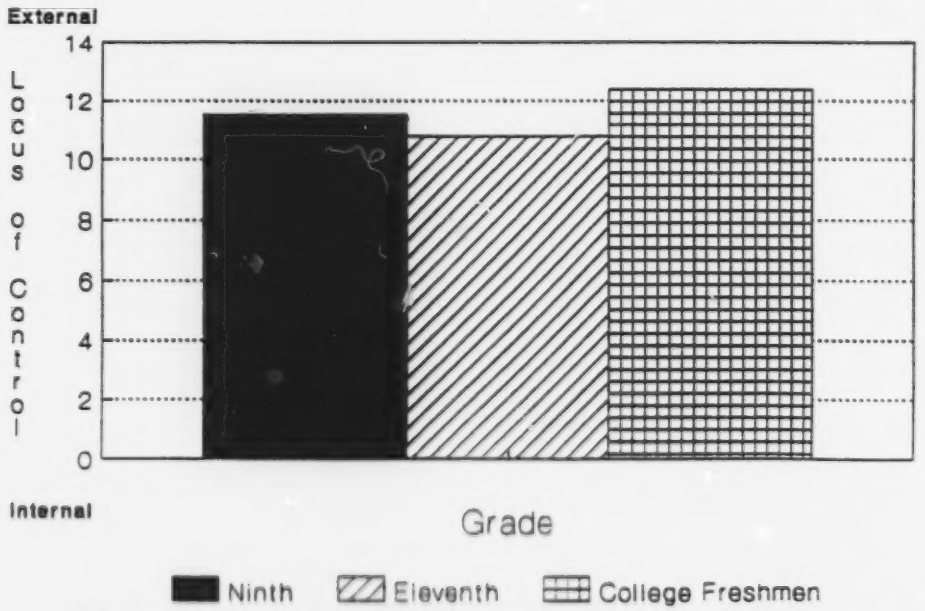




**Figure 4: College freshmen scored significantly more externally controlled than eleventh grade students**

**Figure 5: College freshmen rated their mothers as more authoritative than eleventh grade subjects**

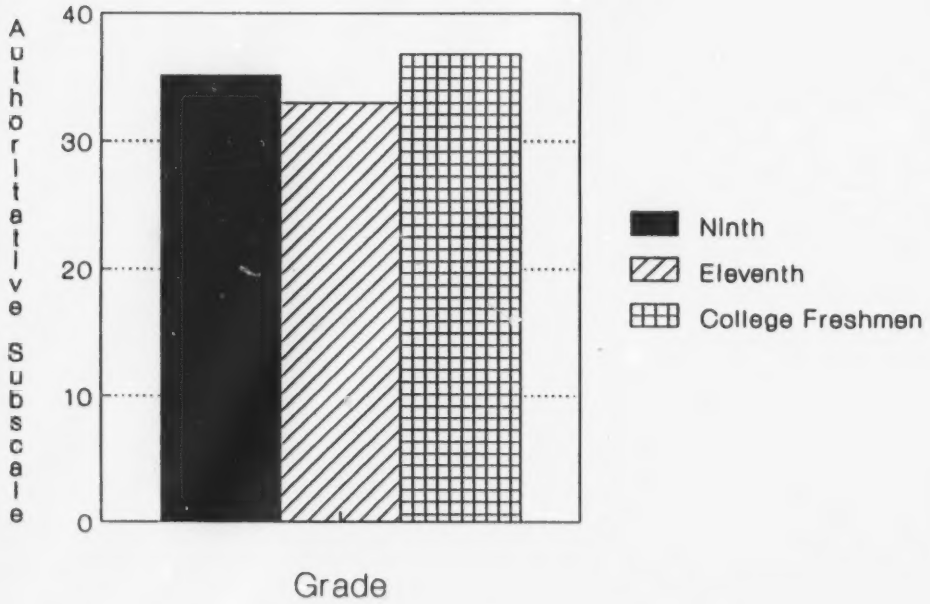
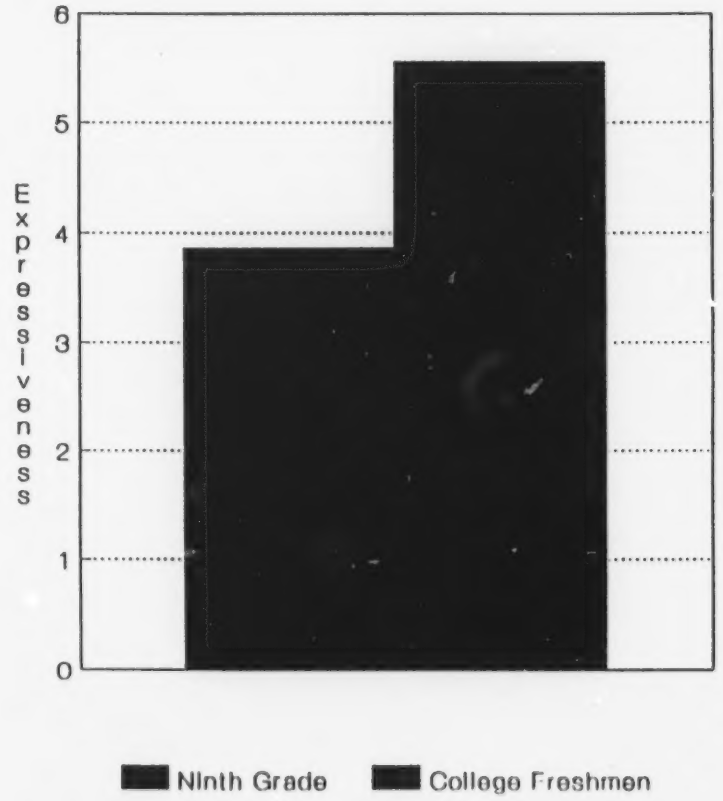


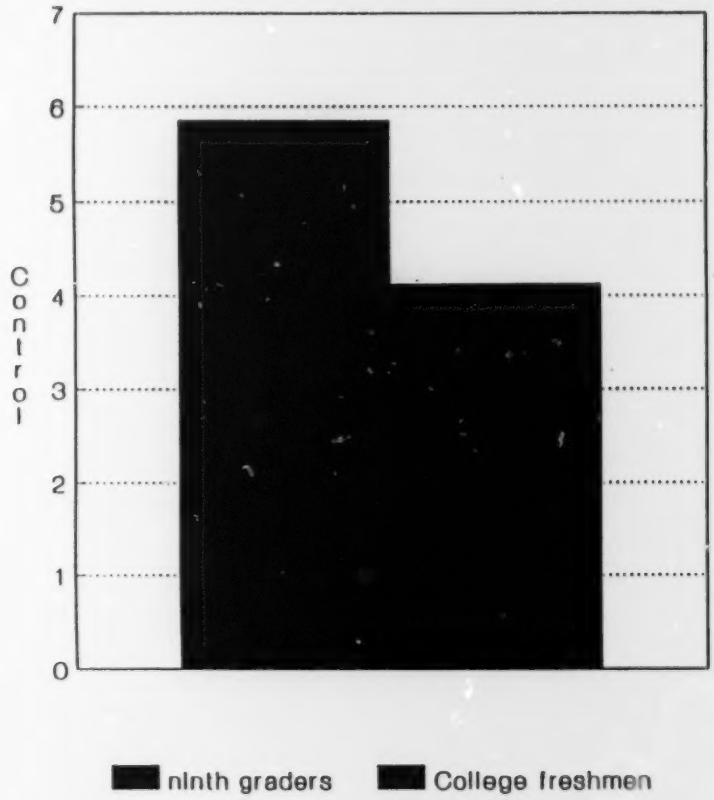



**Figure 6: College freshmen females score higher on Expressiveness than ninth grade females**




p<.003; range 1-0

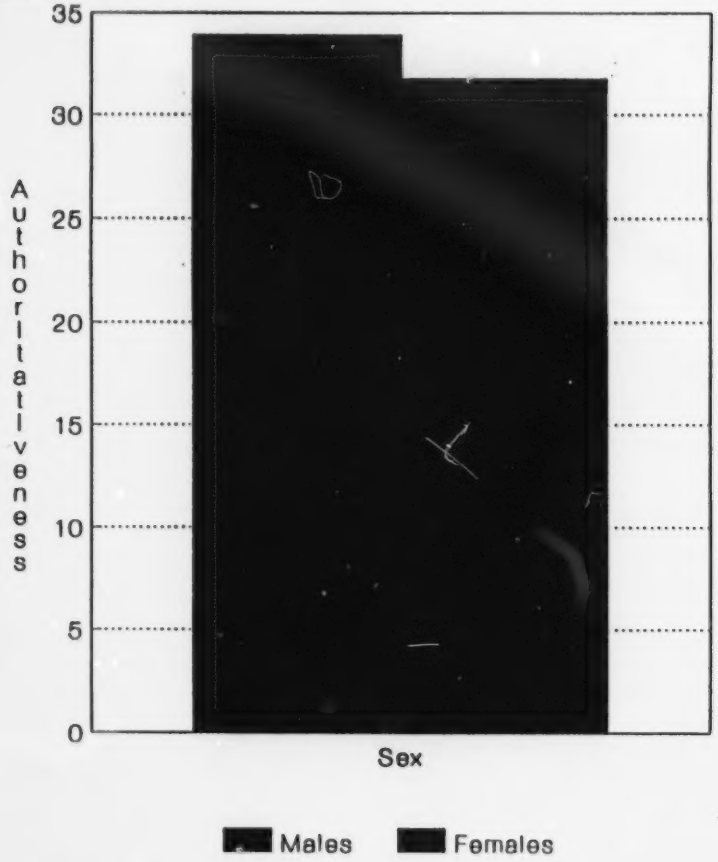
**Figure 7: College freshmen score lower on perceived control in their families than ninth grade subjects**




p<.001; range 1-9

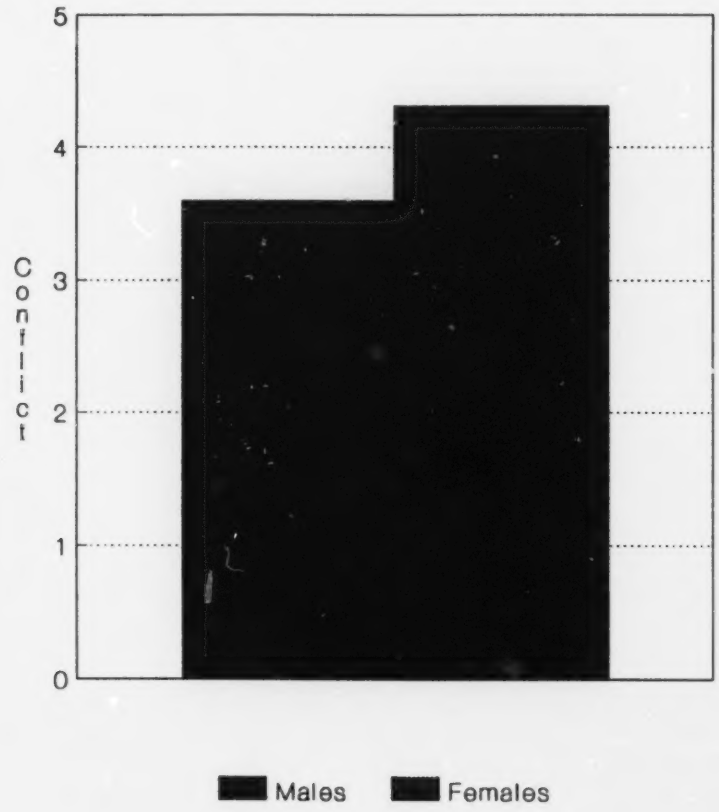


**Figure 8: Males rate their fathers as more authoritative than females**




t=1.909, p<.05; range 10-50

**Figure 9: Females rated their families as higher on conflict than males**




t=-1.909, p<.05

Table 1.

Correlations between student ratings and each parent rating on each subscale of Moos' Family Environment Scale.

| Subscale on FES | Correlation with Mother | p value | Correlation with Father | p value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| $n_{males}$=16; $n_{females}$=30 | | | | |
| Cohesion | .360 | .055 | .045 | ns |
| Expressiveness | .508 | .005 | .048 | ns |
| Conflict | .616 | .001 | .259 | ns |
| Independence | .134 | ns | .004 | ns |
| Achievement | .036 | ns | .201 | ns |
| Intellectual | .653 | .001 | .313 | ns |
| Active recreational | .537 | .003 | .331 | ns |
| Moral religious | .736 | .001 | .825 | .001 |
| Organization | .545 | .002 | .277 | ns |
| Control | .268 | ns | .246 | ns |